



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The Eighth Week After Pentecost (August 1 – 5, 2022)

Monday

Ephesians 2:17-22

¹⁷ So [Christ] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; ²¹ in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

In this letter to the Ephesians we hear the announcement that Christ has proclaimed peace to those “far off” and peace to those “near.” The writer is talking here about Jews and Gentiles. He says that Christ’s death on the cross has put to death the hostility between the two groups and now all believers are “fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.” This is important to remember. Sometimes we forget that those who don’t worship as we do or don’t believe precisely as we do are members of the household of God too. They are not “fraudulent Christians” simply because they baptize by immersion instead of sprinkling, or because they only have Holy Communion twice a year. We sometimes squabble and make a fuss about all sorts of things that, finally, may not matter a great deal at all. With all the divisions there are in our society, *outside* of the Church, perhaps it behooves us to keep to a minimum the divisions *within* the Church. Maybe if we modeled the peace that Christ brought to the world, we might help be the healing presence that is so badly needed.

Prayer

God of All Wisdom, forgive us for our petty infighting. Forgive us for failing to see all your children as members of the household of God. Grant us a new spirit, a spirit of peace, so that when we are confronted with difference we might strive for the unity found in you. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Psalms 16:5-11

⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.

⁷ I bless the LORD, who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

⁸ I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

¹⁰ For you do not give me up to Sheol or let your faithful one see the Pit.

¹¹ You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

This is a psalm for those of us who live comfortably, for we who have been blessed to have “the boundary lines fall in pleasant places.” This can rightly be said about many of us who have been raised in this country. We live in a land where war, famine, and government collapse are unknown. We live in a land where a vast infrastructure of education, transportation, medicine, commerce, and industry is in place. We live in a land where fine crops and abundant harvests are taken for granted, along with so many other things. Many around the globe lack these things, and can only dream of taking them for granted as we do. And so as those who have a “good heritage” it behooves us to do as the psalmist does and “keep the Lord always before us.” This means paying close attention to the ways that God is leading us, and doing all we can to follow in those ways. This means taking our cues from Jesus when it comes to our words and actions toward others. This means living in gratitude for all that we have in Christ. This means being generous in sharing our abundance. It is true, as the psalmist says, that God shows us “the path of life.” In Christ’s presence there *is* fullness of joy, and in Christ’s right hand there *are* pleasures forevermore.

Prayer

God of All Life, thank you for your countless blessings to us, your people. We do not know why we have been so blessed, but we thank you for the abundance we enjoy. Help us to be good stewards of your abundance, and to keep our eyes ever turned toward you, so that we might walk in the ways of peace and love all our days. We ask this in Christ’s name. AMEN.

Wednesday

II Corinthians 13:5-10

⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed. ⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth but only for the truth. ⁹ For we rejoice when we are weak but you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may be restored. ¹⁰ So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

This is the very end of St. Paul’s last letter to the Corinthians. Some scholars have called it the “severe letter” for its tone. It has the tone of a parent that has heard that the teenagers left to their own devices while Mom and Dad are away are *not* fulfilling their promises. “Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?” says the apostle. St. Paul is reminding the Corinthians who they are. They bear the name of Christ. Their behavior is a witness to the world. Their words and actions will

announce to the world that this is what followers of Christ look like. This reminds me of a time when a Vietnamese family was moving into our community and our church was helping them get settled. When I arrived with a pickup full of furniture for their new apartment they were baffled. Since they did not speak English, I drew a picture of a church with a cross on it and pointed to all the stuff I had brought. The man's face lit up and he said, "Ah, Christian!" He understood; these gifts were from Christians. Every day we have the opportunity to bear witness to Christ. It behooves us to remember that our witness can be one that brings honor to Jesus and blesses others, or one that scandalizes his name, and causes hurt. We need no reminder which witness we must choose.

Prayer

Almighty and Gracious God, we thank you for the opportunity we have each day to bear witness to the name of Christ. Help us to be faithful in this calling. We are your people. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 9:21-27

²¹ [Following Peter's declaration, Jesus] sternly ordered and commanded [his disciples] not to tell anyone, ²² saying, "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised." ²³ Then he said to them all, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit them if they gain the whole world but lose or forfeit themselves? ²⁶ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ Indeed, truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."

Losing one's life in order to save it - this one of the hardest things to understand, and yet it is the crux of the Jesus way. We so much want to believe that it's the other way around, that if we only do lots of spiritual weightlifting so that we are spiritual superheroes will we ensure that our spiritual life is safe. We want to believe that if we only study enough and pray enough and serve enough, then our salvation is ensured. But Jesus says no. Jesus says, you must let go of the need to build yourself up and, in fact, *die*, if you want to live. That is to say, we must let go of our own life so that the life of Jesus can live within us. It is as St. Paul said in the letter to the Galatians: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." It is no longer I who live, but Christ. This is how we lose our life in order to save it.

Prayer

Lord Christ, release us from our continual quest for salvation apart from you. Help us to release our life into your safe-keeping, and to trust that the more we are yours the more we are truly alive. Give us faith to live each day in your grace. We pray this in your holy name. AMEN.

Friday

Genesis 24:42-48

² “I came today to the spring and said, ‘O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! ⁴³ I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, “Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,” ⁴⁴ and who will say to me, “Drink, and I will draw for your camels also” —let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.’

⁴⁵ “Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew. I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ ⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels.’ So I drank, and she also watered the camels. ⁴⁷ Then I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him.’ So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son.

If you haven’t read the story of how Abraham sent a trusted servant to his kinsman seeking a wife for his son, Isaac, it is worth reading the whole of Genesis 24. It is a love story, even though, of course, it is an arranged marriage in the manner of such things in the days of Abraham. What is worth noting in this story is how this servant simply trusted that God would lead him to the woman that was right for his master’s son. He asked for a specific sign, and when it was fulfilled, he was certain that God had led him to this point. I wonder if our modern skepticism of such methods doesn’t often keep us from looking for God’s hand in our everyday lives. Unlike Abraham’s servant, we don’t ask God for guidance and we don’t expect any; we simply assume that we are to live by the wits that God has given us. What if, instead, we began to be attentive to, or even expectant of God’s guidance in our lives? What if, instead of simply living by our wits, or as St. Paul said, “by sight,” we decided to walk by faith? What then? Would we perhaps notice that God *is* active, leading and guiding us each day? Might that not be quite an adventure?

Prayer

Give us faith, Gracious God, to believe in your guiding. Give us faith to live each day expectant that you are watching over us and leading us. Help us to see you at work, and give us joy in our seeing. We pray this in the name of Jesus. AMEN.